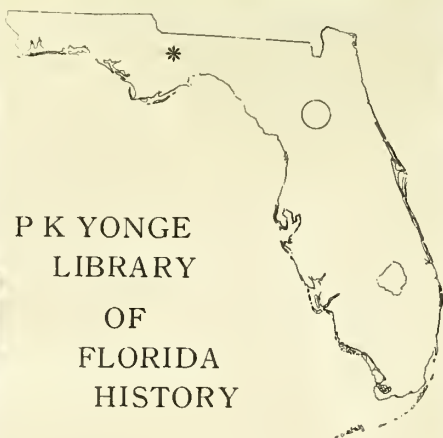


# Indian River Steamers

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INDIAN RIVER STEAMERS

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Indebtedness to Mr. William F. Hale of Jacksonville, Florida, is acknowledged for a description and account of the boats mentioned, also for information furnished.

Certain other facts are based upon childhood recollections and stories related by my father, first superintendent of Indian River Steamboat Company.

Ernest Watson

Jacksonville,  
Florida,  
January 6, 1936.





Indian River steamers

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The pioneer line of steamers on the Indian River was the Indian River Steamboat Company. This line was established in 1889 with headquarters at Titusville. Capt. Wm. B. Watson, formerly General Manager of the DeBarry line of steamers on the St. Johns river, became superintendent at the organization of the company. It was the outstanding line and the only large organized system of steamers on the river.

The long run of the service was from Titusville to Jupiter and return and required a day and night each way. At that time the lower east coast of Florida was undeveloped and sparsely settled and the natural beauty of the river and shores with overhanging coconut and palm trees made the trip a popular one for tourists. It was a common sight to see groups of Indians along the river bank and at landings. A great deal of interest was added to the trip when the steamers reached, first, the Indian river narrows, and further on the Jupiter narrows which gave the appearance of jungles. The passage through these narrow, crooked waterways was slow, tedious and difficult, especially difficult in the case of the Jupiter narrows. Large long poles were used by the deck hands to push the steamers off either shore during the progress of the passage.

The short run was from Titusville to Melbourne and return and was known as the daylight trip. The steamers on this run would leave Titusville in the early morning returning in the late afternoon or early evening.

The first steamer placed in the service of the Indian River Steamboat Company was the GEORGE M. WHITE, a stern wheel freight and passenger boat. Shortly thereafter the GEORGIANA, a steamer of





the same type but larger was added to the service. These boats were followed by a still larger boat named the ROCKLEDGE. It was a large steel, side wheel freight and passenger boat but as it drew too much water it was not altogether satisfactory for the Indian river run.

These boats were not equipped with accommodations for overnight travel and in order to provide for the comfort of passengers on the long run two new steamers were built and named the ST. LUCIE and ST. SEBASTIAN. These were large stern wheel freight and passenger boats with stateroom accommodations, dining service and comfortable deck space. With the building of these boats the ROCKLEDGE was taken off the regular schedule and only used for occasional runs.

To meet the demands upon the service, especially during the winter season, another steamer was built and named ST. AUGUSTINE, a stern wheel freight and passenger boat. It was different from the ST. LUCIE and ST. SEBASTIAN in that, while it maintained dining service and was equipped with adequate deck space, there were only four staterooms for the accommodation of passengers. These staterooms opened upon a small saloon after the large saloon.

The Florida East Coast Railway had first terminated its line at Cocoa. Henry M. Flagler had decided upon extending the road to Palm Beach and work on the extension was progressing. Mr. Flagler would charter the ST. AUGUSTINE for his exclusive use in making inspections from Titusville to Jupiter. The steamer would be equipped with crew and provisioned and made ready for his use in connection with the work.



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With the increasing freight and passenger business the need for another steamer soon arose and the PROGRESS was purchased and brought from Mississippi. It was a large boat of the type used on the Mississippi river, equipped with staterooms, dining service, spacious decks and capable of carrying a large cargo. This steamer was added to the Titusville-Jupiter run and during the orange and pineapple seasons it made the run heavily loaded with the fruits.

The line owned and maintained for the exclusive use of the superintendent of the company a boat named CLEO. It was a twin screw propeller boat about sixty feet in length. There was a small cabin after the pilot house with sleeping accommodations for the superintendent and two bunks. This boat was used by him for the purpose of making inspections and transacting necessary business of the line. The CLEO would be taken out of Titusville by the engineer , oiler and pilot to Eau Gallie or some other destination. The crew would then return to Titusville on some passing steamer of the line. A cook was maintained on the boat at all times although the superintendent lived at the hotel in Titusville and, while at the southern end of the line, stayed on the CHATTAHOOCHEE, a boat which was kept at the dock in Jupiter and operated as a floating hotel. The CHATTAHOOCHEE had previously been in service on the St. Johns river and operated under the Plant System of steamer connections.

The steamers of the Indian River Steamboat Company terminated the run at Jupiter. Smaller boats on Lake Worth and lower tributaries were handicapped in handling shipments of freight and





in receiving supplies. In order to meet the need and serve that section the management of the line constructed a narrow gauge railroad between Jupiter and Juno on Lake Worth, a distance of about eight to nine miles. At Juno the smaller boats as well as the craft of individuals in that section were then able to deliver and receive freight and supplies and the service was extended as far south as Lantana and Hypoluxo. The railroad was in charge of Capt. Matheson and only one engine was used in the operation of the service.

This narrow gauge railroad operating over the narrow strip of land served a useful purpose and was of great benefit in the early settlement and development of the lower east coast. All the lumber used in the construction of the hotel Royal Poinciana at Palm Beach was transported over the road as Henry M. Flagler had not at that time completed the extension of the Florida East Coast Railway that far south.

Associated with the Indian River Steamboat Company beside Capt. Watson, the superintendent, were Capt. Steve Bravo, formerly of the DeBarry Line, Capt. A. W. Buie, Edward Fitzgerald, chief engineer of the line, Charles H. Watson and Mr. Dickinson, as purchasers, Christopher Hale, Billy Lee, J. M. Lorrimer and others.

Capt. Watson was succeeded in the management of the line by Capt. Bent who, in turn, was succeeded by Capt. Buie.

While Capt. Bent was superintendent of the line he instructed Capt. Buie to take the steamer ST. AUGUSTINE from the Indian River through the haulover to the Halifax river. Capt. Buie





did not consider the trip a safe one at that particular time or season of the year and refused to take the steamer out. He went into the pilot house and removed his license from the wall. His judgment was evidently sustained as he was not so long afterwards made superintendent of the line.

An independent steamer on the river was the SWEENEY. It was a large stern wheel Mississippi river type boat. It entered the freight and passenger service on the run between Titusville and Jupiter and return in competition to the steamers of the Indian River Steamboat Company. The SWEENEY was first under command of Capt. Patterson; later, Capt. Steve Bravo severed his connection with the Indian River Steamboat Company and <sup>was</sup> given command.

The river traffic increased with the rapid development of that section. The transportation of freight down the river and of pineapples, oranges and other citrus fruits up the river became a paying business. At Titusville the fruit was loaded on freight cars for shipment by rail.

During the pineapple season there was keen competition in handling the fruit, each steamer trying to out do the other in capacity loads. The boats had a custom of hoisting a broomstick at the stack to indicate that a full cargo was aboard.

There were many orange groves along the Indian river and pineapple plantations were numerous in that section of the state.



The oranges grown along the Indian river are widely known and advertised as "Indian River Oranges", famous for sweetness of flavor and juicy content. The most well known grove was the Dummitt grove at the head of Indian River which was reached by navigating a small creek. The trees were of extra size and the crop a large one. There were many smaller groves along the river among which were the Gingrass grove, Sharpe grove, Brock grove at Sharpe's landing and deGive grove at Rockledge.

N. B. The information with regard to steamers was obtained in interviews with Mr. Wm. F. Hale of Jacksonville, a son of the Christopher Hale mentioned. Mr. Wm. F. Hale also confirmed certain remembrances of the writer with regard to the subject.





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